



Christopher Agostino's **StoryFaces**™

A Celebration of Stories and Why We Tell Them

The Power of a Story

Who won the race, the tortoise or the hare? We all know the answer, and we know it from a story. With that story comes an intrinsic reminder about the value of perseverance: *slow and steady wins the race*. This is why such stories survive. The traditional function of folktales to pass wisdom and cultural information on to children via entertaining stories they will remember (and repeat to their children) is still effective today. We remember stories. They are the building blocks of memory. Current memory research says that we are always telling ourselves the stories of our own lives, creating memories by repackaging our experiences into stories to retain and recall them, and, importantly, how we re-write those experiences effects the choices we make when presented with similar opportunities in the future — so even our personal stories serve to retain life-lessons in the same way as Aesop's Fables do.

The power of a story also resides in its ability to inspire the listeners and elevate their understanding of what they can achieve beyond their personal experiences, as in the Native American tale of the mouse who becomes an eagle through his acts of compassion, or the ancient Chinese legend of the brave maiden Li Chi who slays a dragon then chastises the spirits of the maidens sent to sacrifice before her for not taking care of the dragon themselves. Taking control of our life through the story we make of it is the essential lesson of the hero tale.

Hero tales are the original motivational programs, designed and time-tested to inspire positive behavior and exemplify attributes such as courage, perseverance, intelligence and self-sacrifice. These types of tales are important for older kids and teenagers to hear as they begin to deal with personal responsibility and the emotional turmoils of life, questioning who they are and seeing themselves as either victims or heroes in a challenging world. Folktales also allow for ways to discuss real life more abstractly, through parables and imaginary characters, so that a story can approach difficult subjects without being too personal.

Young people need to hear stories, both traditional folktales and original life stories, not only for their ability to pass on received wisdom but also for the insight they give kids into understanding the story of their own life, into taking control of how they write that story. Beginning with the concentration skills that develop from listening to stories, the ability to parse the essence of the story within a folktale, anecdote, life experience, etc., engages higher reasoning and comprehension skills that can be applied directly to writing, reading and all forms of problem solving.

When I am telling a story to an audience, what I am listening to is their silence — when the audience is silent I know they are experiencing the story for themselves, living it. It is becoming their story too. In that silence I recall that this is something we humans have done from our very beginning. The power of a story is an essential expression of human consciousness: to understand ourselves better by learning about others, to reach forward into the future through what we pass on to our children and to take control of who we are and all that we dream of becoming.



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